

■ Land Tenure

Land tenure describes the farm operator's ownership interest in the land farmed. The major land tenure categories are (1) full owners, who own all the land they operate; (2) part owners, who own some and rent the remainder of their land; and (3) tenants, who rent all of their land or work on shares for others. The majority of farms in the 1997 Agricultural Resource Management Study (55 percent) reported full ownership of the land they operated, while 35 percent owned part and rented part of the farmland they operated. Only 9 percent of operations reported that they rented all of their land.

Part owners generally operate the largest farms, averaging 800 acres in 1997, followed by tenants with 545 acres and full owners with 219 acres per farm. Part owners account for the largest share of acreage operated (62 percent of the total in 1997).

Gross farm sales are also concentrated on part-owner operations (54 percent of gross farm sales in 1997). The average value of gross farm sales for part owners in 1997 was \$125,867, about \$8,988 less than the average for tenants at \$134,855. Gross farm sales for full-owner operations were much smaller, averaging \$45,632.

■ Major Uses of U.S. Cropland

The major uses of U.S. cropland include cropland harvested, summer fallow, land idled in Federal programs, and crop failure. Cropland harvested peaked in 1981 at 351 million acres. Harvested cropland declined to 287 million acres in 1988 and is estimated at 314 million acres in 1998. Summer fallow acreage ranges between 20 million and 34 million acres per year. Cropland idled in Federal commodity and conservation programs has ranged from none in 1980 and 1981 to 78 million acres in 1983 and 1988. Crop failure generally varies within a range of 5-11 million acres per year. The noticeable differences are often the result of weather conditions such as the drought in 1988, or the flood and wet weather at planting time in 1993.

In 1983, the sharp decline in cropland harvested was the result of "PIK" (payment-in-kind), a USDA land retirement program that paid for the land retirement with surplus commodities. The idle acreage in 1983 included nearly 49 million acres in the PIK program and more than 29 million acres in the Acreage Conservation Reserve and Paid Land Diversion programs.